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An American family

The Medranos make it big in *Redbook* for redefining 'normal'

By BILL CHAPIN
Times Herald

While other houses are displaying seasonal flags featuring turkeys and cornucopias, the one hanging on the Medrano family's front porch features squirrels. It reads, "Welcome to the nut house."

With 10 children ranging in age from 5 to 22 - not to mention two dogs and five cats - things are indeed a little nutty inside, but not too noisy. The children know that once their mother, Denise Medrano, starts counting, they have until she reaches three to quiet down - or they can go to their rooms.

A rare find

Big families with excitable children aren't all that unusual, but seven of Denise and Ray Medrano's children originally came to them as foster children. Eventually they were able to adopt all seven children, which the foster-care agency supervisor tells them is extremely rare.

"She's never heard of it in her whole career," Denise said.

Zoom Photo



THE DAY'S LESSON: Nicole Medrano, 22, leads home-schooled Brayden, 9, in a word-comprehension lesson. Brayden was looking up the definition of "indivisible."

MEET THE MEDRANOS

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Denise having a hysterectomy.

It was this aspect of the Medrano clan that attracted the attention of *Redbook*. The family is featured in the November issue of the magazine as part of a feature titled "The Changing Shape of the American Family."

"We're two of the shyest parents, so we're not sure how to take all this," she said. "Everything's been happening really fast, but that's life in our house."

Foster care temporarily places abused or neglected children with caretakers, usually for only a few months. The goal of the system is to reunite the children with their parents or other relatives. Foster parents have the option to adopt only if that can't be accomplished.

Discovered

The magazine located the Medranos through an online foster-parenting support group they joined in 1999. Today the Web site has thousands of users, but Denise said the original 10 families stay in close contact.

"We call ourselves Nuts 'R' Us," Denise said.

Foster parents typically can't talk to the media about children in their care, so the magazine asked the Web site's founders if they knew of a family that had adopted their foster children.

Denise and Ray were 18 when they had their first child, Nicole. Within four years they'd had another two, Brad and Josh.

In 1999, complications from hemophilia lead to

"We decided we weren't done parenting," Denise said. "Ray and I love kids."

- **Parents:** Denise and Ray, both 40. Denise works as a substitute teacher and secretary for the Port Huron Area School District. Ray is a store clerk.
- **Biological children:** Nicole, 22; Brad, 20; and Josh, 18.
- **Adopted children:** John-Davis, 13; Curtis, 13; Brayden, 9; Michael, 7; James, 7; Daijah, 5; and Byron, 5. John-Davis, Brayden and Michael are biological brothers; Curtis and Daijah are biological siblings; and James and Byron are biological brothers.

Zoom Photo



PICTURE PERFECT: The Medrano family on Thursday gathered on the couch in their Port Huron home for a family photo. They are, front row from left: Jon-Davis, 13; Brad, 20; Daijah, 5; mom, Denise, 40; dad, Raymond, 40; Byron, 5; Nicole 22; and James 6. Back row from left are: Curtis, 13; Brayden, 9; Michael, 7; and Josh, 18. The family was one of several featured in the November issue of *Redbook*.

Zoom Photo

Their first foster child, Michael, arrived in October 1999. A premature infant with cerebral palsy, he was on oxygen therapy.

"Originally we never intended on adopting," she said. "We really just thought we could help another family out."

Said Ray: "They say you're not supposed to get attached, but you can't help it."

Learning to adjust

By the following June, they had added a total of four children to the family. It was a big adjustment for the Medrano's biological children.

"I was a little bit jealous at first," Brad, 20, said.

Within a few months, however, he was asking if the adopted boys could move into his room.

"Ray was working 65 hours a week," Denise said, so the older children helped out a lot, making sure certain children were fed and ready for bed.

The adopted children came from three different Wayne County families. Each child has at least one biological sibling living with them, and each has a story behind his or her arrival.

Byron, 5, stayed with the Medranos for a short period as an infant, then was returned to his biological family. When he came back eight months later, he weighed only 8 pounds.

"We were very upset," Denise said.

Only one of the eight foster children they've cared for, an infant who stayed with the family for two weeks, did not eventually become available for adoption. The process hasn't always been easy, though. The family has gone to court several times to retain custody of some of the children.

A matter of faith

"God had his hand in all of this. James was supposed to go home so many



FATHER-SON BONDING: Byron, 5, gets a special treat Thursday - washing dishes with his dad, Ray - in the kitchen of the family's home in Port Huron. The Medrano family of 12 is featured in this month's Redbook magazine. Seven of Ray and Denise Medrano's 10 children are adopted.

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times, it's unbelievable that he's still here," Denise said. "We couldn't imagine losing him. ... We all stood here in the living room, held hands and prayed the judge would make the right decision."

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She pointed to a oval pendant around her neck. A present from Nicole, it is engraved with the word "believe," which Denise said is a reference to Mark 11:24. The Bible verse reads, "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."

"That page is worn out in my Bible," she said. "I used to read it all the time to convince myself everything was going to be OK."

For the most part, everything is OK - albeit a little nutty at times.

Contact Bill Chapin at (810) 989-0741 or bchapin@gannett.com.

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Originally published November 19, 2006



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